

# NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION ORDINANCE UPDATE

## WORK PROGRAM DETAIL



Prepared By  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
CITY OF SANTA BARBARA  
CALIFORNIA  
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## NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION ORDINANCE UPDATE

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## **Attachment 1: NPO Related Issues**

### NPO Function

- A. ABR Purview
- B. Thresholds
- C. Staff and ABR Member Resources
- D. Piecemeal Development
- E. Language Clarity
- F. NPO Checklist

### Design Outcome

- A. Poor Design in Projects Exempt from NPO
- B. Difficulty in Guiding Applicants

## **Attachment 2: Research Scope**

### Municipal Code Update

- A. Reclassification of triggers for application routing
- B. Permit routing methods by incentive
- C. Municipal Code simplification
- D. Public Noticing Options
- E. Hillside Design District Boundaries Review
- F. Address piecemeal development
- G. Establish time limits on NPO findings
- H. Expand projects eligible for administrative staff approval

### Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines Update

- I. Design guidelines for compatibility, other jurisdiction research
- J. Floor to lot area ratios (FAR's)
- K. Mass, bulk and scale definitions
- L. Neighborhood definition
- M. Square footage, building height, slope and grading calculation methods
- N. Hillside spilldown regulation methods
- O. Strengthen Good Neighbor Policies
- P. Early site constraints flagging
- Q. Optional: Form-based zoning approach applicability and feasibility

## **1. Project Scope**

**Goal.** Achieve quality, single-family residential project design compatible with existing neighborhoods through efficient design review. Address issues associated with the Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance (NPO) through a public update process.

### **Project Objective**

Update the Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance, Single Family Residential Design Guidelines, and permit process procedures with public input and Steering Subcommittee guidance. Lay groundwork regarding neighborhood characteristics for general plan update, focusing on neighborhoods in transition.

### **Project Customers**

Santa Barbara neighbors of development, applicants (“developers”), City Council, Architectural Board of Review (ABR), Historic Landmarks Commission (HLC), Planning Commission (PC), and City of Santa Barbara staff.

### **Customer Needs**

- Address issues associated with the NPO since it was adopted.
- Achieve project design outcomes desired by the community largely through an effective NPO with associated guidelines. Create fewer circumstances where Architectural Board of Review and appeal hearings are needed to achieve appropriate project design.
- Simplify requirements.
- The public needs a clear and efficient design review application process and assurance that ABR standards, guidelines and review are sufficient to ensure compatible neighborhood designs.

Staff needs to meet public expectations while minimizing ABR hearing time and backlog through a design review process, which is both effective and efficient.

**Anticipated Project Results.** Attachment 2 outlines research to be completed as part of the Neighborhood Preservation Ordinance Update. Options will be provided for consideration to the Steering Subcommittee and public. Depending on feedback during the public review process regarding options provided, some of the following project results are anticipated by staff.

1. Application requirements reclassified
2. Permit routing methods by incentive options
3. NPO Municipal Code simplified
4. Public noticing standards reviewed
5. Hillside Design District boundaries reviewed
6. Piecemeal development discouraged

7. Time limits established for NPO findings
8. Potential to expand projects eligible for administrative staff approval considered
9. Design guidelines updated to improve neighborhood compatibility
10. Floor to area ratios (FAR) options considered
11. Mass, bulk and scale definitions provided
12. Standard neighborhood definition options provided
13. Square footage, building height, slope and grading calculation methods reviewed for consistent application
14. New regulation methods to limit hillside “spillover”
15. Good Neighbor Policies potentially strengthened, story pole options examined
16. Site parcel constraints flagged earlier in review process
17. Optional: Initial consideration of form-based zoning approach applicability and feasibility

Staff anticipates that the combination of the above NPO Update project components will lead to less impacted ABR hearings and overall higher quality single-family project design.

### **Customer Requirements**

- Adoption in 2005
- Consulting budget of \$30 - \$40K
- Neighborhood Visual Survey to better define desired design outcomes & involve community
- Steering Subcommittee review process for oversight, guidance & expert input
- Explore potential for tailored standards for selected neighborhood (e.g. Marine Terrace)
- NPO Ordinance and Design Guidelines user-friendly for general public
- Key solution topics analyzed and recommendations produced (see attached “Key Analysis”)
- Adjust and clarify ABR’s purview and review triggers. Address piecemeal development.
- Permit processing procedures and design guidelines must be effective, easy to implement, and fair. The procedures should minimize public hearing time while maximizing desirable design outcomes.

### **Final Deliverables: Due in 2005**

- Updated NPO Municipal Code language
- Updated Single Family Residential Design Guidelines to ensure new homes and additions are compatible with existing neighborhoods.
- Updated permit processing procedures (e.g. exemptions, noticing, appeals)

### **Additional Organizational Goal**

Monitor progress and continually rescale project to maintain timeline and budget.

## 2. Interim Deliverables Chart

Product	Review	Reason
NPO Work Program	City Council	Ensure clear work program
Research Topic Papers	Steering Subcommittee	Issues orientation and recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hearing Notices</li> <li>• NVS Pres. &amp; Handouts</li> </ul>	Staff	Correct content
Visual Preference Survey (NVS) up to 7 community meetings	Public	Identify issues of concern, identify initial potential solutions
NVS Results Report	Steering Subcommittee	Expert comments, public input
Research Topic Papers	Steering Subcommittee	Expert comments, public input
NPO Ord. Language	Attorney's Office	Legal drafting and review
Updated NPO and Design Guidelines	Steering Subcommittee	Confirm expectations are met
Updated NPO and Design Guidelines	Ordinance Committee	Review Steering Subcommittee work, provide any necessary adjustment in direction
Updated NPO and Design Guidelines	ABR/PC/HLC	General level review on any outstanding issues make recommendations
Revised Updated NPO and Design Guidelines	Staff	Ensure O.C. & ABR/PC, & HLC comments addressed
Updated Design Guidelines	City Council	Review & approval
Implementation and Training	Staff	Ensure correct application

### **3. Organization**

#### **Steering Subcommittee**

City Council:	Brian Barnwell & Helene Schneider
Planning Commission:	Charmaine Jacobs & Bill Mahan
ABR:	Stephanie Christoff & Richard Six
HLC:	Vadim Hsu
Allied Neighborhood Association:	Dianne Channing and Claudia Madsen

#### **Staff**

Management:	Paul Casey, Community Development Director Bettie Hennon, City Planner
Supervisor:	Jaime Limón, Senior Planner
Project Manager:	Heather Baker, Project Planner
Planner Tech. Support:	Jackie Ellis, Planning Technician II Suzanne Johnston, Planning Technician I Rain Longo, Planning Technician I (Note: Very limited Planner Tech. time available)
Clerical Support:	Jody Rodgers/Deana McMillion, Administrative/ Clerical Supervisor Angel Craig, Office Specialist II
City Attorney:	Stephen Wiley, City Attorney
Risk Management:	Brad Landreth
Zoning Staff Liaison:	Danny Kato, Senior Planner Marisela Salinas, Associate Planner Mark Morando, Planning Technician II
Development Review Staff Liaison:	Jan Hubbell, Senior Planner

#### **Consultants**

RRM Design Group	Mark Brouder, FIUD & Debbie Rudd, AICP
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## **4. Constraints, Project Improvement Priorities and Potential Risks**

### **Constraints**

Time: The previous NPO Update work program was initiated in August 2002 with an approximate one-year time frame. That work program relied heavily upon consultant work for project completion. Since August 2002, project manager staffing has changed and Council has directed that the project rely less on consultant work. A new project manager has been hired for the project as of September 2003. Also, a new work program is necessary to reflect less consultant input and reorient the program towards a Steering Subcommittee public review process. As a result, the timeline for the work program is estimated to take closer to one and a half years.

It is important to note that the public involvement process will include the Neighborhood Visual Survey workshops (NVS), Steering Subcommittee reviews as well as hearings before the ABR, PC and City Council. The community workshop VPS workshops at the beginning of the project and the four-month Steering Subcommittee review process are expected to garner the bulk of public comments and suggested revisions. Four hearings total among the HLC, PC, and ABR are assumed. One Ordinance Committee meeting and two City Council adoption hearings maximum are scheduled in the program. Should the program generate demand for additional public workshops or hearings, the project timeline and completion date will be delayed.

Staffing: Previously, a Principal Planner was assigned to this project. The project is now primarily staffed with a Project Planner and a Supervising Planner. A standard level of management assistance and minimal planning technician and administrative support staff will also be available throughout the project.

Consultant Budget: As noted above, consultant expenditures are not to exceed \$30 to \$40 K.

### **Potential Risks**

Scope Creep. This project is very complex. Additional issues may be proposed to be addressed at any point. Staff will need to be careful not to commit to more analysis and solutions than is possible in the project time, staffing and budget constraints. As one example of potential scope creep, at a recent joint Council and Planning Commission work session, interest was expressed in creating a second ABR solely for residential projects. Developing a proposal for a second ABR would expand the scope of the NPO Update beyond this work program, and raises major budgetary concerns. Staff knows some potential additional research topic items, such as the following:

- Solar design guidelines
- Green building incentives
- Multiple family residential design
- Private view preservation

Other, unexpected topics might also arise. Adding topics to the NPO purview would delay timelines presented in the NPO Update work program.

Incorrect Public Perceptions of Proposed Program. During planning processes, incorrect rumors can easily spread among community members. Sometimes public members may speculate that a program may threaten something important, rather than find out the specifics of a proposed program. For example, upon hearing that new regulations regarding single-family home design are being worked on, some members of the public might think the purpose of the update is simply to control development size, rather than overall design. Or an owner might fear that their ability to choose paint color for their home may be curtailed. The City must carefully communicate program goals so the public correctly understands components of the proposed program as it evolves, and also understands what the program **does not** include. Staff should stay abreast of any incorrect rumors by keeping open communication with the public and ensuring the program goals and components are clear.

Unclear Public Input. The visual preference survey workshops should yield useful information to guide the NPO update. However, there is a possibility that opinions among the public and within neighborhoods may vary greatly, making it more difficult to update the ordinance in a way that satisfies the community. Also, public perception of the purpose or function of the update process may easily be skewed.

Unexpected Single Family Design Review Purview Requests. As part of the NPO, criteria to determine when ABR Design Review occurs will be re-examined. Staff will essentially be asking the public to confirm whether the ABR should continue to review certain types of single-family residential projects. Staff anticipates the public will request similar types of projects be reviewed by the ABR (large, two-story projects) with minor adjustments perhaps in the current exception requirements. However, there is a possibility that some public members may request a radical departure from the current ABR review purview – either by requesting ABR review of many more types of single-family residential projects or by requesting largely eliminating ABR project single-family project review. In either case, unexpected extensive reconsideration of ABR’s purpose and function within the larger City project review process would be necessary.

Demand for additional review. Since the NPO will greatly affect most developers, neighbors and staff, interest in the update outcome is expected to be high. Review is scheduled through a Steering Subcommittee, the ABR, the PC and City Council. Input from the public at the ABR and Steering Subcommittee meetings is also accommodated and encouraged. However, should any group request substantial changes or rewrites of staff proposals, it may become necessary to repeat certain review steps, adding an additional review hearing or hearings and delaying the process. Staff will work to ensure proposals are clear and carefully considered to avoid requests for major rewrites. However, both political and technical issues associated with this project are great, which leads to significant risk in this category. Accelerating the project schedule where opportunities arise to allow for additional review time at the end of the process if needed is desirable.

Staff changes. Changes at any level of staffing within the City of Santa Barbara or changes in RRM Design Group staff working on the project could lead to delays as training and reorientation occurs.

Multiple Family Residential Design. Multi-family project design concepts are not part of the Single Family Design Guidelines or included in the scope of the NPO update. Adding affordable housing units within the City is a crucial activity. Adding affordable by design, such as multiple family housing, within the City is crucial. Proper design of multi-family buildings is essential for public acceptance of new affordable multi-family units. During Visual Preference Survey workshops or Steering Committee review of the NPO Update, it may be suggested that staff expand the purview of the NPO beyond single-family structures to include multi-family residential structures. Adding this component would add time to the NPO update process as proposed revisions and guidelines would be expanded. Note: multiple-family residential design guidelines will be given priority as party of the Housing Element Implementation work program.

## **Attachment 1: NPO Related Issues**

The NPO was adopted in 1991 in order to ensure new developments would be compatible with existing neighborhoods. One review of the NPO was conducted in 1994. A Steep Slopes Subcommittee began to discuss some issues associated with the NPO in the 90's. This update provides the first opportunity to formally review the NPO's effectiveness since that time comprehensively. Where the Ordinance does not function as intended, changes to the ordinance may be necessary. Where problems are still arising in the community, which the NPO has been ineffective in addressing, new, additional regulations or standards may be prudent.

### **NPO Function**

**ABR Purview.** The ABR has been given a large purview and wide range of responsibility. Due to term limits, more turn over of board members is anticipated to result. It has been suggested that some projects that currently require project approval findings appear beyond the Board's realm of strongest architectural, design and aesthetics expertise. For example, members are asked to make findings regarding minimizing grading, bluff top and creek setback considerations. Alternatively, some projects reviewed by the ABR, such as decks or fences not visible from public viewing areas, seem overly simple, and inappropriate for ABR review.

**Thresholds.** Thresholds, which trigger design review, may not "catch" projects, which should be reviewed by the ABR. Also, some thresholds may "capture" projects, which would be better left out of the ABR process.

**Staff and ABR Member Resources.** Unfortunately, many NPO triggered projects arrive at ABR with designs, which need substantial improvement. Numerous reviews are typically scheduled for one project. This review pattern creates a large amount of work for planning staff and ABR members alike. Unfortunately, despite hours consumed to review projects in public meetings, desired design results are sometimes not achieved. Hearing schedules are often over-full as a result of repeat project reviews, leading to delays for applicants in ABR hearing scheduling and/or long ABR meetings. Also, expanded noticing of ABR meetings since 1999 and recent televising of meetings appears to have lead to heightened expectations among members of the public participating in the ABR review process. More members of the public are attending ABR meeting and commenting on projects with high expectations for project redesign. This heightened public comment has lengthened project hearing times and complicated ABR review. Both ABR and staff members' resources are strained as a result of the general ABR review system project-hearing overload.

**Piecemeal Development.** NPO triggers have apparently led some applicants to propose additions sized just below NPO trigger levels. It is currently unclear to what extent piecemeal development may be an issue for single-family home projects.

**Language Clarity.** The actual NPO in the Zoning Ordinance is written in a legalistic style difficult for laypersons to understand. Also, triggers and exemptions for ABR review and required findings are very difficult to decipher. Most laypeople must rely upon the NPO Checklist in order to interpret NPO requirements.

**NPO Checklist.** The Municipal Code is written in a way that is cumbersome for the public and staff to easily interpret on a daily basis. To simplify the NPO process for the public, staff created an “NPO Checklist” whereby applicants can determine if they are subject to the NPO after answering a series of questions. However, neither the ordinance nor the checklist easily conveys the logic behind which categories of projects are referred to the ABR. An interim revised checklist for counter use, which communicates ABR review category groupings, is being developed.

**Design Outcome.** As noted above, under “Staff and ABR Member Resources”, desired design outcomes are not always achieved by the NPO. More design examples of preferred outcomes are necessary and should be included in the design guidelines.

**Poor Design in Projects Exempt from ABR Review.** It appears some large projects have been designed to be exempt from ABR review by narrowly avoiding review triggers. An amendment to the NPO allows for an exception to ABR review when a number of miscellaneous design criteria are met (e.g. stepping back upper floor of the home). Some members of the public have viewed this type of exemption as a “loophole”, since the projects may be “large” two-story projects, which intuitively seem similar to other projects which ABR reviews.

**Difficulty in Guiding Applicants.** The NPO findings are broad enough to give the ABR leeway in making suggested changes to projects. However, the Single Family Design guidelines do not address many design topics of concern to neighborhoods. Illustrations and descriptions of projects with quality design to help guide applicants create better quality designs compatible with existing neighborhoods prior to participating in ABR review are currently lacking. Also, the ABR may be satisfied with the design of certain projects, but not all neighborhood members may be satisfied with the neighborhood compatibility of the resulting project. Clarification of acceptable design parameters among community members is needed to align neighborhood and ABR project opinions. For example, a site may not currently be considered to appear “overdeveloped” to the ABR, but may appear so to neighbors.

## **Attachment 2: Research Scope**

The following research work scope describes seventeen planned “Issue Papers”. Staff expects these topics will be included in the NPO Update analysis. The Steering Subcommittee will have the opportunity to provide comment regarding options presented in the Issue papers. The first eight topics are associated with the actual NPO Municipal Code, while the other fourteen topics are associated with updating associated Single-Family Residential Guidelines.

### **Summary:**

#### **Municipal Code Update**

- A. Reclassification of triggers for application routing
- B. Permit routing methods by incentive
- C. Municipal Code simplification
- D. Public noticing options, including story pole options
- E. Hillside Design District Boundaries Review
- F. Address piecemeal development
- G. Establish time limits on NPO findings for PC approved projects
- H. Expand projects eligible for administrative staff approval

#### **Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines Update**

- I. Design guidelines for compatibility, other jurisdiction research
- J. Floor to area ratios (FAR's)
- K. Mass, bulk and scale definitions
- L. Neighborhood definition
- M. Square footage, building height, slope and grading calculation methods
- N. Hillside spilldown regulation methods
- O. Strengthen Good Neighbor Policies
- P. Early site constraints flagging
- Q. Optional: Form-based zoning approach applicability and feasibility

Please note the NPO Update is not intended to address the following topics. Adding any of the following topics to the NPO purview would delay timelines presented in the NPO Update work program.

- Solar design guidelines
- Green building incentives
- Multiple family residential design
- Private view preservation

Following are more detailed descriptions of the expected NPO Update Work Program research topics.

## **Municipal Code Update**

- A. Reclassification of triggers for application routing.** Since the NPO was enacted, the ABR and the Planning Commission have reviewed many more types of projects than in the past. Long hearing schedules and delays in application approvals has led to dissatisfaction with both the review process and design results. Reducing the quantity of projects reviewed by the ABR and/or the PC would require identifying project types, which can avoid duplicative reviews or receive adequate design review from planning staff. Staff will compile statistics regarding project types reviewed both by the ABR and PC. Smaller NPO projects and other alterations that currently undergo duplicative reviews might be removed from ABR or PC review without negative design results. Standards for administrative approvals can be developed to ensure effective design review outside of the ABR process.

Staff will also analyze characteristics of recent projects, both controversial, and acceptable, focusing specifically on what project characteristics seemed to be common among appeal projects. Staff may discover that additions within a certain square foot to lot size ratio may trigger appeals more often. This pattern of appeal data patterns may be a good basis for new design standard criteria.

- B. Permit Routing Methods by Incentive.** In the NPO Issues section, the problem of poor design in projects circumventing the NPO is discussed. In many cases, projects exempt from ABR do not always display quality design or result in compatible neighborhood development.

Staff will investigate if design standards can be developed to achieve high quality designs by offering alternate review process to achieve the desired design outcomes. Additional design criteria could likely be added to projects currently exempt from ABR review to ensure designs can be approved without an ABR review hearing process yet still follow architectural design standards. For example, rather than just homes under 4,000 square feet being exempt, homes which also feature stepped back upper floors, a garage located in the back, a porch, and specific levels of architectural details might be suggested for exemption. In this way, desired design might be better ensured without required ABR hearings.

- C. Municipal Code Simplification.** Currently the NPO is written in such a complex manner that it is not readily apparent to most staff and the public which projects are subject to ABR review and which is not. This NPO update will clarify the ordinance so that it is easily understood and easily implemented.

- D. Noticing.** Currently, required mailed noticing to property owners within 100' feet of a project occurs 10 days prior to ABR public hearing project review. Sometimes a larger, optional 450' radius mailed noticing for ABR hearings is utilized. Projects exempt from ABR review have no noticing requirements. Some community members have expressed that this noticing process is

inadequate. Some jurisdictions require on-site noticing, noticing for a greater radius than 100' from a project property, or noticing for a greater variety of projects. On-site noticing, visual aid story poles, or other measures to improve noticing effectiveness may be recommended as part of the NPO Update.

- E. Hillside Design District Boundaries Review.** The current Hillside Design District boundaries were designated prior to the availability of the more accurate slope information technology, which is available today. Generally, Hillside Design District properties are intended to include properties with a 20% average slope or greater. However, due to lack of complete information at the time of the Hillside Design District designation, some properties in the District have slopes of less than 20% and some properties outside the Hillside Design Districts have slopes of greater than 20%.

Properties located within the Hillside Design District may be exempted from ABR if the property slope is less than 20%. In the late 1990's, the City contracted with Penfield & Smith Engineering to provide a map of the slope of all City properties. However, the method Penfield & Smith used to calculate slope is different than the procedures City staff and applicants currently utilize. Staff will analyze the current available information, slope calculation methods and recommend options for updating the Hillside Design District boundaries. Exemptions for properties within the Hillside Design District will also be examined to ensure equal and fair review mechanisms.

- F. Address Piecemeal Development.** Currently the Municipal Code contains a rebuttable presumption (Section 22.68.045.D) that any grading, construction of retaining walls or removal of trees within the two years prior to permit application will be considered as part of ABR review exceptions analysis. However, this language does not require previous construction of new square footage be included in calculations to determine whether ABR is required under Section 22.68.040B. Previous square footage additions are only considered in public hearing requirements under Section 22.68.065.B. The current lack of consideration for previous applications has the effect of encouraging piecemeal development applications. Staff will recommend a reasonable method for considering previous projects in ABR review determinations to ensure piecemeal development be discouraged.

- G. Establish Time Limits On NPO Findings For PC Approved Projects.** Currently, all approvals by the Planning Commission, City Council and other hearing bodies carry with them time limits. However, NPO findings carry no time limitations. For better administrative practice, staff will suggest time limits and an implementation mechanism for ABR NPO findings.

- H. Expand Projects Eligible for Administrative Staff Approval.** Currently, the ABR Guidelines list fourteen types of minor alterations eligible for administrative staff approval including residential reroofs, door changes, small wood decks, certain fences, and minor outdoor lighting alterations in section 2.4.G. However, there has been some discussion that additional small-scale project types, which are not readily visible from public viewing locations, may



be appropriate for administrative staff approval. Eliminating additional small projects from ABR review would free time for the ABR to focus more on larger projects with greater potential to create visual impacts. Expanded single-family design guidelines that establish specific aesthetic design criteria should help staff to ensure quality projects without referring projects to the ABR Consent Calendar. Staff will compile data regarding quantities of project types reviewed by the ABR. Staff will identify small project types currently reviewed by the ABR which might be better handled through an administrative staff approval and thus reduce ABR's review workload.

### **Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines Update**

- I. Other Jurisdiction Practices.** Communities throughout the United States are facing similar compatibility issues. Staff will review other jurisdictions' approaches to neighborhood compatibility issues to glean relevant ideas.
- J. FARs.** Floor to Area Ratio (FAR) requirements are being requested by some neighborhoods. FARs can give general guidance toward reasonable lot build-out according to lot size. Many communities have implemented FARs to better control mass, bulk and scale of development. It may be difficult to establish FAR's for all sectors of the City. FARs were previously considered and discarded as too cumbersome. However, staff will revisit this topic due to neighborhood demand and may make recommendations regarding FARs. Preliminarily, potential recommendations might include any of the following:
  - FAR threshold which triggers ABR review
  - Maximum FARs
  - Bonus FARs. In the case that a maximum FAR is established, bonus FAR could be granted for certain design components such as locating a garage behind a house or including a functional front porch.
- K. Mass, Bulk and Scale Definitions.** Staff and ABR are focused on reducing the visual impacts associated with projects' "mass, bulk and scale". However, despite the ubiquity of these terms, they are not clearly defined. Some jurisdictions have succinctly defined these words for their review processes. Staff will provide clear definition options for discussion.
- L. Neighborhood Definition.** Staff and ABR must find projects compatible with the "neighborhood" to approve projects. However, "neighborhood" is defined differently in different circumstances. Interested neighborhood members typically can include any of the following:
  - Properties which provide a view of or across the project site
  - Properties on the same street or in the same tract as the project site
  - Properties surrounded by the same main arterial or most directly access by passing the project site
  - Properties in the same homeowner's group or neighborhood association
  - Properties within 100' or 450' (consistent with noticing requirements)
  - Properties on an adjacent block of the project site

Neighbors are now presenting “neighborhood” square footage information at ABR meetings. It is difficult for ABR and staff to respond to presented average “neighborhood” square footage calculations because of the ambiguity of the term “neighborhood” and because collecting this data for each project is not routine for applicants or staff. Through the Visual Preference Survey workshops with neighborhood groups, it is expected that homeowners group can help with standardizing the term “neighborhood” for their area. It may be that some Homeowner areas actually consist of two or three neighborhoods, which could potentially be grouped by average lot size.

**M. Square Footage, Building Height, Slope and Grading Calculation Methods.** Calculation practices for these project characteristics varies among City staff. Depending on the method used, calculation results will tend to be either higher or lower than other methods. Also, triggers for ABR review, FAR, and lot coverage requirements can only be fairly implemented if standard calculation methods are implemented. Since many applicants may be familiar with calculation methods used by the County of Santa Barbara, City of Carpinteria and Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties, staff will research methods used in these jurisdictions and recommend standard calculation methods for the City of Santa Barbara.

- Square Footage Calculation. Currently, staff calculates square footage by a net “area inside exterior walls” method for some purposes and a square footage “gross area” calculation method is used for other purposes. The gross area method leads to higher totals than the area inside exterior walls method applied to the same project. The main goal is to ensure that net and gross calculation methods are applied consistently.
- Building Height, Slope, and Grading Calculation. Currently, building height, slope and grading calculations may not be applied consistently among applicants and staff. Staff will clarify existing calculation methods, recommend standard calculation procedures, and suggest methods for standard application of the calculation procedures.

**N. Hillside Spilldowns.** Currently the Single Family Residential Design Guidelines Hillside Design Techniques allow hillside “spill down”. However, there are no limits on how far a structure may spill down a hillside. Structure height from natural grade is restricted for projects. However, the visual impact of a structure stepped down a hillside when viewed from off-site can be similar to that of a very tall structure. Staff will examine potential solutions to hillside spill down issues, such as County of Santa Barbara grading limits recently enacted in the Toro Canyon Plan, and recommend an approach for preventing excessive hillside spill down.

**O. Strengthen Good Neighbor Policies.** The Single Family Residence Design Guidelines contain Good Neighbor Policies, which explain the importance of coordinating with neighbors to ensure both a smooth review process and maintenance of good neighbor relationships. These policies are not mandatory. Many communities have “early neighbor notification”

requirements whereby applicants must bring signed statements that they have shared development plans with neighbors or held an open house regarding their project. Early consultation with neighbors could result in significant savings in hearing time if issues can be worked out prior to the ABR review process. Staff will analyze the current Good Neighbor Policies and may recommend some part of the current policy be mandatory rather than suggested.

#### **P. Flagging Site Constraints Early in Review Process.**

Background. Many vacant parcels in the City have several site constraints that may impact the development potential of the property. Significant geologic, creek or drainage related issues may make a project less buildable or unapprovable due to engineering feasibility, setback requirements and safety issues. Applicants may invest substantial funds and significant staff resources to a project without knowledge of these parcel site constraints. After the Holmcrest Road Subdivision appeal in 1995, City Council directed staff to develop methods in the permit review process to determine how City site constraint information can be shared with applicants early in the Land Development review process to avoid “late issue discoveries” in the future.

On-Staff Geological Expertise. Unlike many jurisdictions, the City of Santa Barbara does not have a geologic specialist on staff. Staff with experience regarding geologic issues in the Building and Safety Division can lend assistance to planners, but staff is usually in the position of accepting geology reports. Staff has the ability to call for third party review of the geology reports, but often does not use this option. Staff may be reluctant to call for the third party reviews because of the extra expense to the applicant, or lack of expertise to identify when a geologic report may have identified potential issues for a project.

General Constraints Identification. Aside from geology-specific issues, other parcel constraints may also not be known for some time during the review process. For example, archaeology or biology constraints may not be identified as significant until late in the process in some cases. Although general maps on these topics are available to planning staff, smaller cases are often assigned to relatively inexperienced planners with large case volumes who may not consult the maps in depth until late in the process.

The NPO Update process is expected to identify several potential solutions to these issues:

- “Tags” in the Permit Plan system. The Permit Plan software has the ability to place “tags” on parcels, which have special constraints or zoning violations. Whenever information about the parcel is queried in the software, a warning alerts staff to see the “tags” associated with the parcel. Digital mapping layers connected to data regarding constraints have recently been mapped. The information from these layers is expected to be downloaded into the Permit Plan software in the form of tags within the next few months.

- Geological Expert Contract Expansion or Staff Hire. Staff will survey a few nearby jurisdictions with similar terrain and populations regarding how geology expert input is triggered through the review process. Staff will evaluate whether or not an on-staff geologist is necessary at the City of Santa Barbara, or alternatively, how the City's current third party consultant review process might potentially be improved.
- Geological Expert Consultation Guidelines. To accompany the recommended geology expert process, guidelines would be produced to clarify when geologist expert input should be requested. The guidelines should be especially helpful to new staff.

**Q. Optional: Form-Based Zoning Approach.** The Form-Based Zoning approach popularized in many new planned developments in Florida has become a New Urbanism planning trend. A developed community, City of Hercules, in the Bay Area, has also instituted a form-based zoning code. Instituting a form-based zoning code in Santa Barbara would involve more than is intended through the current NPO Update. For example, form-based zoning codes are typically meant to replace cumbersome & wordy zoning ordinance documents with simple diagrams reduce focus on building uses. However, for evolving developed communities, implementing a form-based zoning code to replace an existing ordinance is difficult. Staff will examine opportunities to use form-based zoning code diagram formats in design guidelines or to implementation of a form-based zoning code as an optional alternative to the traditional zoning code.